



Students: Share Travel Plans with Family to Avoid Grandparent Scams

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MADISON – With spring break just around the corner, the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection is asking students to share their travel plans with family members in order to avoid becoming victims of family emergency scams – better known as “grandparent scams.”

“Wisconsin residents lose thousands of dollars to the grandparent scam every year,” said Sandy Chalmers, Division Administrator for Trade and Consumer Protection. “The FBI has been receiving reports about these scams since 2008, and the FTC heard from more than 25,000 older Americans nationwide who reported losing a combined \$110 million through this scam in 2011 alone.”

Grandparent scams always involve a request for cash tied to a story about an emergency a grandchild is facing. The scammer, posing as the grandchild, will call an elderly citizen asking for money to pay for tuition or textbooks, fix a car, get out of jail or leave a foreign country.

After requesting payment by wire transfer, the grandparent is asked by the “grandchild” not to tell anyone else about the situation. A second person claiming to be a police officer, lawyer or bondsman may also call the grandparent to add legitimacy to the story.

By sharing their spring break travel plans with family members, students can prepare their relatives in case of a fraudulent call for help in their absence. If the family members are aware of the student’s itinerary, they should be able to sniff out a scam if the story they get in the call does not line up with the “real” grandchild’s plans. Families should also establish a backup contact in case a worried grandparent cannot reach the grandchild after receiving one of these troubling calls.

The Bureau of Consumer Protection offers additional tips for handling these scam calls:

- Resist the pressure to act immediately.
- Do not wire money. The chance of recovery is slim to none.
- Verify the caller’s identity by asking personal questions a stranger could not answer. Remember that some impostors research the people they are posing as and can answer basic questions about them.
- Never provide your bank or credit card account numbers – regardless of the reason.
- Try to contact the grandchild at a number that you know is accurate or check out the story with a parent, spouse or another close family member before you send any money – even if you have been asked to keep the call a secret.
- If you cannot reach a family member and still are not sure what to do, call the Bureau of Consumer Protection or your local police on the non-emergency line.
- If you repeatedly receive fraudulent calls, file a complaint with the police.

For more information about grandparent scams or other fraudulent activities targeting elderly citizens, visit the Consumer Protection website at <http://datcp.wisconsin.gov>, send an e-mail to datcp hotline@wisconsin.gov or call toll-free at 1-800-422-7128.

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